



## Hope for Marital Intimacy After a Past of Sexual Abuse

### Key ideas:

1. Marital intimacy – Loving your spouse’s whole person as an act of worship to God.
  - a. Whole person: As humans we have three primary parts of our whole person: emotional, mental, and physical. As Christians, our spiritual life intertwines throughout every part of us, influencing and changing how we feel, think and act.
  
2. Worship – We worship God because through the gospel, we have been made whole and new in Christ.
  
3. Love – We are able to love because God has loved us (1 John 4:7-11).
  
4. Marital oneness – Oneness in marriage is special and unique because it was meant to showcase the union between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:22-32).
  
5. Abuse – Sexual abuse complicates the pursuit of intimacy because it is destructive to both the victim and non-abused spouse.

### Word of Encouragement

No matter where you are today, because of God you can always have hope; there is no amount of brokenness that God cannot heal.

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## 1) Loving the Whole Person: Emotionally

### LOVE

- Always be sure your counselee knows you love them and are one hundred percent confident in God's love for them.
- Establish care through verbal and non-verbal communication.
- We counsel people, not problems. Focus on knowing and caring for their whole person, not *just* biblically addressing their "problems."
- Explain how important understanding them is to you and why.
- Build a foundation of trust.
- Connect with them, human to human. Always look for bridges of understanding and like-mindedness.
- Over-emphasize love as your motivation for knowing and helping them.
- Always speak to them in a way that demonstrates you are for them and not against.
- Work hard to empathize even if you can't relate to their pain or abuse.

### KNOW

- Emphasize that you will not be able to help them to the level you both desire if you don't *know* them.
- Ask questions, listen, then ask more questions (ALWAYS ask a follow-up question that goes deeper into the heart).
- Learn their past (what happened / how did they respond), present (what is happening / how are they responding) and future (what do they want or fear will happen / how will they respond).
- Again, focus on getting to know their whole person, not just their sin and problems.
- Don't have an expectation of time frame for how long it will take for your counselee to open up to you.
- Ask them what they are hoping to get from counseling.
- Be honest about how it's okay and normal for vulnerability to be difficult.

### Example: Wife's Feelings

*Grief and sadness over abuse and how it is affecting her marriage*

*A sense of loss over what was taken from her through abuse*

*Hopeless that she will be able to fully move on from this*

*Sad that her past is hurting the husband she loves*

*Scared to be vulnerable because it makes her feel out of control and unsafe*

*Afraid of getting hurt again emotionally or physically*

*Angry that someone could be this selfish with her*

*Angry that she is still negatively affected by abuse*

*Angry and confused about where God was during her abuse and why He didn't stop it*





*Numb when her husband touches her*  
*Emotionally distant from her husband*  
*Physically ugly and uncomfortable in her body*  
*Not good enough or like a constant disappointment to those around her*  
*It was my fault I was sexually abused*  
*Guilty for her abuser's sin*  
*Unworthy of love*  
*My sexual pleasure doesn't matter as much as my husband's*

### **Example: Husband's Feelings**

*Afraid of hurting his wife*  
*Scared to make things worse by saying or doing the "wrong" thing*  
*Unsure of his ability to love his wife well*  
*Angry that someone did this to his wife and he couldn't protect her*  
*Angry that God allowed his wife to suffer abuse and that He didn't stop it*  
*Angry that it is ruining the love and intimacy he desires for their marriage*  
*Helpless to make their marriage a safe place*  
*Hopeless that his wife will be able to move past her abuse*  
*Inadequate to lead and love his wife in a godly and helpful way*  
*Unloved because his wife is emotionally distant*  
*Unwanted because she doesn't seem to be interested in affection or their sexual relationship*

Feelings of Pain,  
Sorrow & Grief



Negative  
Feelings



Sinful  
Feelings

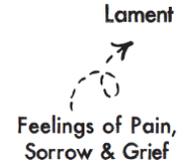
### **SPEAK**

- Explain that wanting to be in control and going into "survival mode" is a normal response to the deep and dark emotions that come from experiencing trauma.
- Give hope by showing God to them in a new way every session.
- Teach slowly and purposefully with the goal of building a solid foundation of understanding; of God and themselves.
- Aim to be repetitive in how you teach and be quick to reemphasize passages and ideas you have already discussed to show them how God's Word fits together perfectly as a whole.
- Always speak to them as an equal, "We are in the same boat; I'm a sinner too and it's hard for me to trust God and do right also!"
- Rather than telling them what to do, help them to see truth for themselves through their own eyes. Allow the Holy Spirit to work!
- Connect truth to their whole person.



**A. Learning to Lament:**

1. Pray Honestly
2. Protest
3. Make Bold Requests
4. Choose to Trust and Praise



“Lament is how we learn to live between the poles of a hard life and God’s goodness. It is an opportunity to remind our hearts about God’s goodness. It is an opportunity to remind our hearts about God’s faithfulness in the past, especially when the immediate events of life are overwhelmingly negative. While we’re still in pain, lament reminds our hearts of what we believe to be true.”<sup>1</sup>

**Lamentations 3:17-26**

**Psalm 13**

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<sup>1</sup> *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy* by Mark Vroegop, p. 36

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## B. Learning from Feelings:



### DO

- Give homework that (1) Helps them to lean into God, and (2) Helps them to move towards each other emotionally by being vulnerable about their negative feelings.
- Help them to learn and understand themselves better through writing or journaling.
- Have them share what they are learning about their fears, struggles and idols with each other.
- Encourage them pray and lament together.
- Explain the balance between praying / relying on the help of the Holy Spirit versus doing the hard work of pursuing righteousness by faith.

## 2) Loving the Whole Person: Mentally

### LOVE

- Emphasize again how much you care for them.
- Affirm their hard work and encourage them when they do well.
- When they fail or fall short help them to see it as an opportunity to draw nearer to God and learn how to better choose next time.

### KNOW

- Learn how your counselee thinks and processes through things.
- Look for patterns in their way of thinking and always ask yourself, “Why?” (e.g. Why is this a common thought for them? Why do they often get stuck on a certain idea? etc.)
- Often repeat back what they are saying to them as a checkpoint to see if you really are understanding them well (“If I’m hearing you right, the hardest thing for you right now is this \_\_\_\_\_ because of this \_\_\_\_\_”).

### Example: Wife’s Thoughts

*Struggling with memories and flashbacks of abuse from various triggers.*

*Believing lies about sex (i.e. it’s not safe or good, dirty, only a physical act, about pleasing self, etc.).*

*Confused why she is sexually afraid of the husband she loves.*

*Desires control and to be in the power position in the relationship.*

*Trusting another human with her heart (even her husband who loves her) feels impossible.*



**Example: Husband’s Thoughts**

*Struggling to not be able to fix these problems or know what do to help.  
Wanting sex feels selfish but is frustrated because he does want physical intimacy with his wife.  
Feels like a victim too because her abuse is negatively affecting him.*

**SPEAK**

**A. Choosing Trust in God Over Self:**

**Jeremiah 17:5-8**

1. Pursuing control and trusting in self leads to a cursed life.



2. Trusting God leads to a blessed life.

3. When God is our trust, we become spiritually productive even in difficult times.

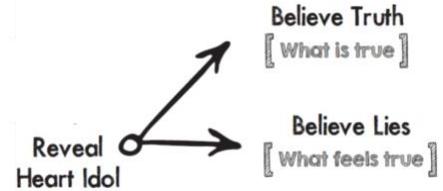


4. When we trust God, we realize fear has no power over us.

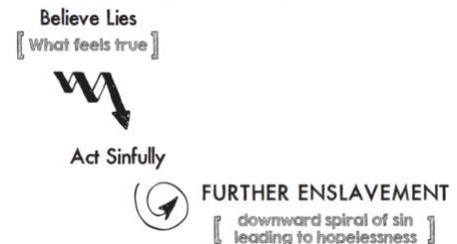




**B. Choosing to Believe Truth Over Lies** - living by what *is* true, not what *feels* true:



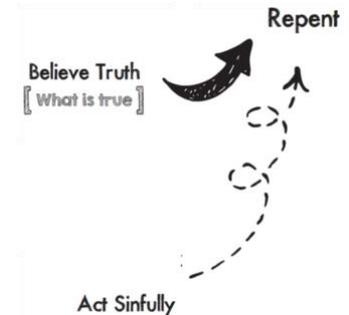
Lie	Truth	Reference
<i>Feelings control my choices.</i>	I am not controlled by feelings.	Genesis 4:3-8
<i>Easy is better.</i>	Hard isn't bad because it gives us a chance to grow in wisdom.	Hebrews 12:11
<i>God doesn't love me right now.</i>	God's love is endless and more than enough for me.	Psalms 36:5-9, 63:3, 73:26
<i>I can't do this.</i>	It's never too hard to do what is right.	1 Corinthians 10:13
<i>Their actions caused me to sin.</i>	I am responsible for my sinful choices because they flowed from my wicked heart.	James 1:14-15, 4:1-2
<i>I have to take control and act this way because I'm scared.</i>	Fear has no power over me.	Psalms 34:1-10
<i>I feel shame and guilt for my abuser's sin.</i>	I should <i>never</i> feel guilt or shame for sin that isn't my own.	Ezekiel 18:20, Romans 14:10-12
<i>I have to take care of myself because no one else will.</i>	God knows what I need and will take care of me.	Matthew 6:25-34
<i>I don't have to forgive.</i>	I forgive others because God has forgiven me.	Colossians 3:13, Matthew 6:14-15





## DO

- Lead your counselee to repentance and explain the freedom we have from guilt and shame through the gospel.
- Explain the importance of confessing sin and asking for forgiveness for ways they've sinned against each other.
- As they are learning to individually fight for trust and believing what is true have them talk to their spouse about when they are struggling so they can help each other move towards God in difficult moments.



## 3) Loving the Whole Person: Physically

### LOVE

- Don't be afraid to talk about physical intimacy openly and honestly.
- Keep it light when you can and make them feel as comfortable as possible.
- A lot of times your counsees will need help to learn how to have pleasure during sex as God intends for them to have; as counselors, we need to be offering this kind of help.
- Be empathetic, real, positive, and hopeful in how you talk about sex.

### KNOW

- Don't be afraid to ask questions about their sex life and experience with sexual pleasure.
- Remind your counsees that nothing needs to be off limits because this is a safe space.
- Explain that we shouldn't be afraid to talk about sex because God talks about it openly in His Word.

#### **Example: Wife's Body**

*Not feeling sexual pleasure and not reaching orgasm*

*Doesn't want to have sex at all or only wants sex to be physical (remaining emotionally and mentally distant throughout)*

*Thinks her husband's pleasure matters more than her own*

*Afraid to surrender completely for orgasm*

#### **Example: Husband's Body**

*Concerned about his own orgasm*

*Doesn't know how to please his wife sexually*

*Moves too fast and/or doesn't focus enough on foreplay*

*Thinks sex is only physical (not emotional or mental)*



## **SPEAK**

- Don't expect them to be superhuman. They will fail and struggle like we all do! The point has always been that Christ was perfect, not us.
- Remind them it is always a choice between worshipping God and worshipping self.

**Worship and  
Act Rightly**

### **A. Observing Biblical Sexual Guidelines:**

#### **1 Corinthians 7:3-7**

### **B. Applying Marriage Roles to the Sexual Relationship:**

#### **Husband**

The husband cares for his wife intimately by living out the roles God intended for him: leader, provider, and protector (who nourishes and cherishes his wife). He pursues these roles with the ultimate goal of understanding her and loving her as Christ loves the church. Headship is about direction, not control. The husband works to move and guide his marriage towards Christ in every aspect of life. (Genesis 2:24, Luke 22:26, 1 Timothy 5:8, Genesis 4:9; 28:15; 30:31, Numbers 3:3-8; 121:3-8, Ephesians 5:25-33)

#### **Wife**

The wife cares for her husband intimately by living out the role God intended for her: helper and nurturer. She helps him to be the servant leader God has called him to be. Through faith and courage, she is characterized by being submissive to his leadership, respecting him, and focusing on her heart (i.e. having a gentle and quiet spirit). Being a helper is not about silent compliance but rather active contribution. Husbands need help from their wives to be who God intended them to be. (Genesis 2:18, Ephesians 5:22-24; 33, 1 Peter 3:1-6).

## **DO**

- Don't get too practical too soon and ask them to do something they will fail at; if they aren't trusting and loving God there will be no motivation or ability to "do" what is right.
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## Working Together:

### Helpful Tips

1. Only 30% of women can achieve climax from intercourse while 70% of women achieve climax from manual stimulation (primarily of the clitoris).<sup>2</sup>
2. It is helpful to embrace how God created male and female bodies *very* different when it comes to sexual experience and pleasure.

### Communicate > Practice > Communicate

1. Communicate: Talk about sex when you are not having sex. Both sides should explain what turns them on, what brings them to climax, how often sex is desired, and everything in between. Come up with game plans, new things to try, and schedule time to practice.
2. Practice: Have times when you are solely focused on learning each other sexually in a safe environment without worrying about either spouse's climax. Have other times where you are focused on making sex itself safe, pleasurable, and emotionally / mentally intimate. If you don't practice often you won't make significant progress!
3. Communicate: Debrief about practices. What worked / what didn't, what made you feel comfortable and safe / what scared you, what gave you pleasure / what didn't feel good, what you want to try again / what to avoid for future, etc.

## Conclusion

LIFE OF  
WORSHIPING GOD  
[ stronger faith, peace  
joy, hope, wholeness ]



Freedom from  
Power of Sin

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<sup>2</sup> *The Case of the Female Orgasm* by Elisabeth Lloyd (Harvard University Press)

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### Extras / Homework:

The following are contrasting lists to the ones we discussed in the session to give you an idea of what progress would look like for a couple in this situation.

#### **Truths About Wife's Feelings:**

- I don't feel close to my husband but I will work towards that because that is what God wants for me and what He wants is for my good. I will try to move closer to my husband emotionally by helping him to understand me through vulnerability and giving him the chance to lead and care for me emotionally.
- God wants me to grieve and protest the suffering at the hands of evil that I've experienced. It's okay for this to be hard and I don't have to minimize my feelings. God's character is strong enough to give me hope even in my darkest moments and I can trust Him with all of me.
- I don't have to be afraid of getting hurt because God is my safe place; He will protect and help me when I seek after Him.
- It's right for me to be angry at my abuser for sinning against me because God also hates that sin. It's not right for me to harbor bitterness and resentment in my heart against my abuser. By doing so, I'm giving him power over me, because my feelings towards him are motivating my current choices. I will not allow my abuser to have power over me. I will make my decisions by faith and truth, not based on how I feel.
- I feel not good enough and unworthy but I know I cannot trust my feelings to be true. Instead, I will choose to see myself as God sees me: spotless, whole, and beautiful.
- I don't need to feel shame for my abuser's sin because that was *never* my burden to carry. I also don't need to feel shame for any of my sin done in response to my abuse because I have repented and been washed clean by Christ's sacrifice and resurrection.

#### **Truths About Husband's Feelings:**

- Fear doesn't control me and I don't have to be afraid. If I am seeking after God and to love my wife selflessly, I can trust that will be for her good. I can trust God to take care of her when I fall short to love and serve her as I desire.
  - It's right for me to hate what God hates and we hate the abuse my wife suffered. It is not right for me to desire vengeance because that is God's role not mine. I need to lead my wife by communicating about her abuse; explaining that I hate the evil done to her as well as speaking of the goodness of God helping her to see and move towards Him in the midst of her pain. I know that in Him only will she find freedom from the power her abuser has over her and be able to release bitterness she has against him. Most of all I will be patient, knowing this will take time, and assure my wife that even if this is a lifelong struggle, I will not grow weary or abandon her.
  - I am weak and needy but God is the strength of my heart, my help and stronghold. He will give me everything I need and help me to be the husband He is calling me to be.
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- It's okay for this to be hard and I don't have to minimize my suffering with God. He knows that I am deprived of intimacy from my wife and the pain that comes from that. I will see this as an opportunity to love as God has loved me, unconditionally, and in the most understanding way. My wife has suffered more than I can even imagine and I will be patient and tender in how I love her even if that means I am continually left uncared for.

#### **Truths About Wife's Thoughts:**

- I can trust God with my flashbacks. I don't need to take control by ignoring or suppressing them. Because God is my trust, I don't have to shut down emotionally to feel safe. I don't have to be afraid of memories because I can still be strong and spiritually stable no matter what.
- I will trust in God and what He has said to be true in His word about sex. Whenever I am tempted to believe a lie about sex, I will trust that God's design is perfect and for my good, not harm.
- I can trust God with my fears; it is scary to be vulnerable sexually, but I don't have to be afraid of things being difficult. If I trust in God instead of trusting in myself or trying to control the situation, I can be strong and spiritually stable even if my husband hurts me .
- I will see control for what it is – a lie that promises freedom and safety but only delivers the opposite. A life built on trusting in myself and pursuing control is a cursed life. I will trust God with everything and make Him my trust, believing it is better for Him to be in control than me.
- I know the problem isn't that I don't trust my husband, it's that I don't trust God to be good and take care of me even when my husband hurts and disappoints me. I don't need my husband to be perfect to trust him or be vulnerable with him, I just need to walk in faith and trust God with both my heart and marriage.

#### **Truths About Husband's Thoughts:**

- I don't need to pursue control by trying to fix all our marriage problems. I will stop believing the lie that it's possible to be in control. Instead I will focus on trusting God and remembering I don't have to be afraid of things being hard. Hard isn't bad, it's just hard.
- I will work at not turning wants into needs and trust that God knows what I need and will provide it. I don't have to be afraid of things never changing because I can still be a spiritually strong and stable man even if my circumstances don't get easier.

#### **Truths About Wife's Body:**

- I will fulfill my role as a helper to my husband by learning my own body and helping him to know what pleases me physically. I won't expect my husband to know how to give me an orgasm without my help. I will simultaneously work hard to give pleasure and help my husband to give me pleasure because this was God's perfect design for sex.
  - I recognize that intimacy as God wants for my marriage isn't just a physical act but also oneness, emotionally and mentally, as an act of worship. I will work hard at connecting with my husband's whole self and help him to do the same with me.
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- I don't have to be afraid of the vulnerability it might take to achieve an orgasm because I don't need to be in control. I can trust God with my body and heart, knowing He will always take care of me. I won't forget that God desires mutual pleasure in our sexual relationship.

#### **Truths About Husband's Body:**

- I will view my wife's pleasure as more important than my own and do whatever work necessary in foreplay to get my wife to orgasm (whether manually or during intercourse).
- I will study my wife in every way; emotionally, mentally, and physically to know what pleases her. God desires for me to understand my wife so I will make this of highest priority in love towards her.
- I will slow down. Even when I think I'm going slow, I'll slow down even more, making her and her pleasure my main focus.
- I recognize that intimacy as God wants for my marriage isn't just sex but rather oneness emotionally and mentally as an act of worship. I will work hard at connecting with my wife's whole self and leading her to do the same with me.

### **Psalms Reading Plan and Journal Questions**

#### *Learning God's Lovingkindness*

Psalms 16, 18, 23, 27, 34, 36, 39, 52, 61, 62, 63, 73, 86, 103, 107, 111, 117, 118, 119, 121, 130, 136, 146

(Read 1 per day and answer the following questions)

- What did this passage say about God and His love?
  - Are there truths here that apply to my struggle with fear?
  - If I believed those truths how would I view my fear differently?
  - What teaching can be best understood from this chapter?
  - How will you apply what you have learned from this chapter?
  - Write out a prayer; talk God about your feelings and fears, ask Him for help to allow truth to re-shape your mind and heart, repent of any sin you have been convicted of, etc.
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### Sex as Sexual Abuse vs. Sex as God Intended\*

<b>Sex as sexual abuse</b>	<b>Sex as God intended</b>
Sex is an obligation	Sex is a choice
Sex is addictive	Sex is a God given desire
Sex is hurtful	Sex is nurturing, healing
Sex is a condition for receiving love	Sex is an expression of love
Sex is a 'doing to' someone	Sex is sharing with someone
Sex is a commodity	Sex is part of who I am
Sex is absence of communication	Sex involves communication
Sex is secretive	Sex is private
Sex is exploitative	Sex is respectful
Sex is deceitful	Sex is honest
Sex benefits one person	Sex is mutual
Sex is emotionally distant	Sex is intimate
Sex is irresponsible	Sex is responsible
Sex is unsafe	Sex is safe
Sex has no limits	Sex has boundaries
Sex is power over someone	Sex is empowering

\* This is adapted from list compiled by [Healthyplace.com](https://www.healthyplace.com).

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## Sample Counseling Session Bible Study

### *Six ways God protects us from sexual sin*

#### *Proverbs 5*

**Instructions:** Our hope in using Scripture in counseling is to create a dialogue, not preach a sermon. For example, we wouldn't say – “here are seven reasons not to lust.” But rather, “I want us to study this together and with the Spirit's help find reasons to understand sexual desire and how it should be used for God's glory. Can we pray before we begin reading and ask for God's help?”

Be sure not to rush through this, take your time and walk slowly through each point. It's fine if you only get to one or two in a session and then can give heartwork to continue developing that one point. Additionally, please shape each point to make it more personal and applicable to the individual you are speaking with.

- 1. God promises to give life rather than taking it.** Looking at verses 1-2 and 7 next to verses 3-4, why does the Father command his son to hear his wisdom and to guard it? [*The visual is that there is another voice that speaks, that everything in you will long to hear but it is a voice of death. The Father's voice is a voice of life*]

What does it look like to hear and guard wisdom in your life? [*Wisdom is seeing God's truth connected to his world, guarding it is like carefully carrying a light from dark room to dark room. This impacts what we allow ourselves to think about, not just what we avoid thinking but how we hold the wisdom of God in our minds and allow it to engage our imaginations and remind us of the true and better story of redemption.*]

- 2. God exposes the lies of idolatry.** Exchanging the creator for the creation is trading life for death according to Romans 1. And verses 3-4 of Proverbs 5 talk about why we make this choice. How do these verses help explain why we turn to sexual sin? *Her words have the appearance, aroma, and taste of life. Honey is used in Psalm 19 and 119 to describe God's word and oil is used in Psalm 23 to describe God's care. The forbidden woman appears to have the voice and the care of God. This is how the object of our lust replaces God. In order to go to turn to a sexual relationship, image, or fantasy we have to say: God your voice and care are bad, your story is bad, you are bad, and they promise me a better story. What is the “honey” and “oil” that a lustful thought, image, or relationship promises you? Looking back at verses 1-2 and 7, how has God's wisdom kept you from sin? How can you guard that wisdom during the times you know that you're vulnerable?*
- 3. God exposes the devastating consequences.** Verse four describes all the consequences that await in two broad categories: she is bitter as wormwood, she is sharp as a two-edged sword, or simply there will be suffering and death. But these are broad categories. In verses 8-14 you can see specific consequences of suffering and death. What consequences do you notice in these



verses? How have you experienced some of these consequences? What other consequences would you list?

4. **God reveals the purpose of sex: selfless love.** What do you see as the purpose of God's gift of sex? Why do you think we all reach sexual maturity as singles? In verses 15-17 we see that sex is never just about me, about scratching an itch. It's a means to love others through self-control as a single or through sacrificial serving in marriage. Both uses of this gift involve self-denial in order to love someone else, putting others before self. If intimacy was given away freely (streams were scattered abroad) than relationships would be a mess. This is why a broad-spectrum self-control allows singles to love others, and self-denial allows a spouse to love others and love their spouse. All other uses of this gift go against God's design. It's a fountain that is shared with no one except your spouse, and when it is shared in marriage it is putting the other person completely before self. (cf. 1Thess 4:3-4 & 1Cor 7:3-4)
5. **God encourages thankfulness for our spouses.** Verse 18-19 has the husband listing specific ways he is thankful for his spouse. Where do you see beauty in your spouse? In a positive way, finish the sentence, he/she is like \_\_\_\_\_? How does he/she encourage your heart's worship of Christ? How is he/she a grace to you? Write notes every day that reflect on her love and show you are intoxicated with it.
6. **God knows and actively cares about our paths.** What comes to mind as you read verse 21? What does it mean for you to live before the face of God, knowing that he watches and considers? We would not look at pornography if a friend was in the room, yet if we do it before the face of our God, what does that reveal about our hearts?

### Journaling Exercise

#### *Comparing What You Believe About Sex with What God Believes*

1. Write down everything you believe and think about sex in a numbered list.
  2. Then list everything you believe God thinks about sex (if you aren't sure write it down anyway and circle it so you can discuss it with your counselor).
  3. Compare your lists. How does the comparison make you feel? Are you surprised? Discouraged? Angry? Write it down.
  4. Review with your counselor.
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